

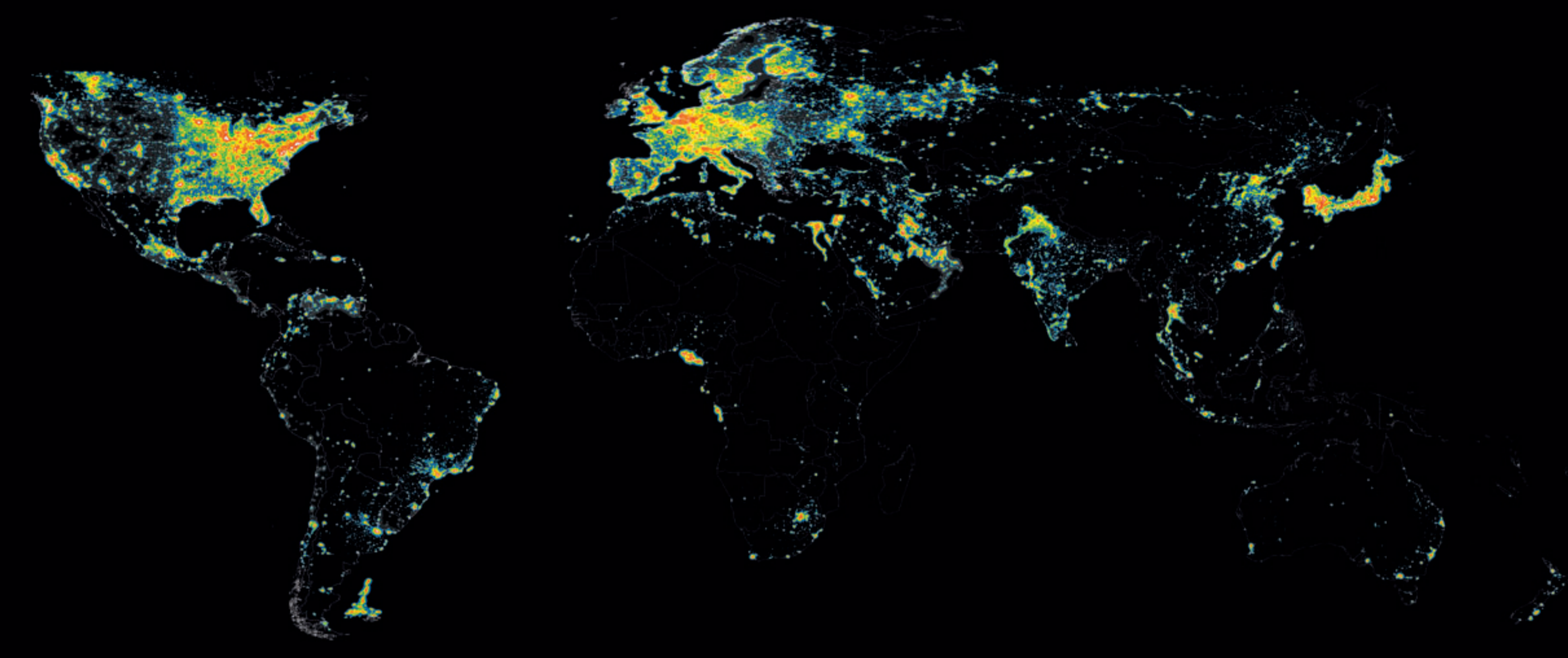
The Dark Sky — Our Universal Heritage

"The sky, our common and universal heritage, is an integral part of the environment perceived by humanity. Humankind has always observed the sky either to interpret it or to understand the physical laws that govern the Universe."
Proclamation of 2009 as International Year of Astronomy, UNESCO, Paris 2005.

Protection of the dark sky is relevant not only for astronomers, but for everyone. More than half of the world's population now lives in cities, where the night sky is barely visible due to light pollution. The dark sky is part of our universal heritage and the visibility of the stars and the Milky Way is a privilege that should be preserved for future generations.

ESO's observatories are located under the pristine Chilean skies, but there are signs that light pollution is becoming a serious problem even there. ESO is an active supporter of light pollution control. Since 1999, Chile has made laws to protect the skies in northern Chile. ESO is also a partner in Chile's Office for the Protection of the Night Sky Quality, along with other international observatories and Chile's National Commission for the Environment.

Protection of the night sky is everyone's responsibility. With small changes in how we illuminate our homes and streets we can save energy while maintaining or even improving the quality of the lighting, reducing the effects of light pollution on people and wildlife, and contributing to the protection of the night sky.



World Atlas of the Artificial Night Sky Brightness.
Credit: P. Cinzano, Thiene, Italy



The Milky Way as seen from Cerro Paranal in northern Chile, where light pollution is very low.
Credit: ESO/Y. Beletsky

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